

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 1 (Part I).

LOS ANGELES TIMES  
2 June 1986

FILE ONLY

# Israeli Official Who Pushed Cover-up Probe Is Replaced

By MICHAEL ROSS, Times Staff Writer

JERUSALEM—The Israeli Cabinet on Sunday replaced Atty. Gen. Yitzhak Zamir, who has come under heavy political fire in recent days for ordering an investigation into a politically explosive security scandal involving allegations of a cover-up by top-level government and intelligence agency officials.

In a terse statement read to reporters after a weekly Cabinet meeting, government spokesman Yossi Beilin said the Cabinet appointed Yosef Harish, a Tel Aviv circuit court judge, to succeed Zamir, effective Wednesday.

Beilin added that the Cabinet decided to impose secrecy and prevent future leaks by agreeing that only Prime Minister Shimon Peres and his appointed spokesmen will henceforth be authorized to comment on the security scandal, which involves allegations that senior officials conspired to cover up the circumstances of an incident two years ago in which two Arab terrorists were beaten to death by their Israeli interrogators.

Beilin, however, asserted there was "no connection" between the affair and the decision to replace Zamir, who he noted had announced earlier this year that he intended to resign as soon as a successor was selected.

"The attorney general said four months ago that he would resign the moment someone was found to replace him," Beilin said. "This was done today."

He added that he expected the cover-up investigation to proceed under Harish, a respected jurist who is described by both left- and right-wing politicians as a tough, "independently minded person" who is not likely to allow his juridical integrity to be compromised by "political pressures."

Despite these assurances and those of Zamir—who told reporters that he is glad to be leaving the office he has held for seven years—the timing of the attorney general's replacement was expected to add fuel to the cover-up scandal, which in terms of scope

and high-level involvement is already being referred to as an Israeli version of Watergate.

According to observers here, the search for Zamir's successor was accelerated only after the attorney general decided to order a police investigation of the security scandal over the strong objections of Peres, Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir and other members of both the Labor and Likud factions of the coalition government, who fear that the investigation could compromise national security as well as lead to embarrassing disclosures.

These suspicions were not laid to rest by Harish, who, in the first interview after his appointment, told Israel television that, in his opinion, the details of the scandal should be kept "secret and not publicized."

## 'Behind Closed Doors'

"I think a discussion (of the affair) is important, but I think it should be held behind closed doors," he said.

The affair—which highly placed sources say could implicate Shamir and, to a lesser extent, Peres in an alleged cover-up of deception and destruction of evidence—is one of two sensitive, security-related scandals in which the government now finds itself mired.

The other involves suspicions by the U.S. Justice Department that Israel deceived the United States when it assured Washington last December that Jonathan Jay Pollard, a U.S. Navy employee caught spying for Israel, was not part of a significant Israeli espionage network in the United States.

Although Israeli officials initially denied any connection to Pollard, they later said that he had been working for a "renegade" branch of Israeli security and that he was recruited without the government's knowledge or approval. It has since been disclosed that the operation was part of a previously secret espionage organization known by its Hebrew acronym as LEKEM, which operated through Israeli science attaches in the United States and elsewhere. Israeli

officials have said that the U.S. operation has been disbanded.

Peres apologized to the United States, saying it is strictly against his government's policy to spy on a close friend and ally.

U.S. officials accepted these assurances, but Justice Department sources told The Times last week that Pollard's subsequent testimony revealed the existence of a much larger Israeli spy ring run by a senior Israeli air force officer who made frequent visits to the United States. The sources added that the size and scope of the Israeli network made it impossible for it to have been run without "high-level" approval.

Responding to these allegations, the Israeli Foreign Ministry's official spokesman on Saturday reiterated the government's earlier denials of the existence of a broad Israeli spy network in the United States but would neither confirm nor deny reports that Washington had presented Israel with new evidence in the case.

Although State Department officials, at odds with the Justice Department, are said to fear that disclosure of more details could affect the stability of Peres' government, the Pollard affair has so far taken a back seat in Israel to the internal security scandal, which senior political sources describe as potentially far more damaging to both Peres and Shamir.

The scandal centers on allegations that Avraham Shalom, the head of the Shin Bet, the Israeli equivalent of the FBI, misled investigators, falsified evidence and ordered his subordinates to lie about the beating deaths of two Palestinians captured after hijacking a passenger bus from Tel Aviv to the southern town of Ashkelon on April 12, 1984.

Initial investigations concluded that the two terrorists died of blows suffered when the bus was stormed by Israeli paratroops. However, a newspaper photo, published in defiance of government censorship rules, showed the two Arabs, alive and apparently uninjured, being led away from the bus, and there was speculation that they were beaten to death by their Shin Bet interrogators. Accusations against Shalom made to Atty. Gen. Zamir's office by three former Shin Bet officials prompted Zamir to order his own investigation of the episode, according to various sources.

"There is no question of a cover-up," a senior security source told *The Times*. "The only question now is to what extent the political leadership participated in it."

Although the government has subjected most the details of the affair to censorship—and moved Sunday to toughen security around the affair—details continued to emerge.

A former senior military official, who was present when the two terrorists were taken from the bus to a nearby wheat field, told *The Times* that Shalom presided over their interrogation.

"He was there. He was the official in charge," the source said. "The only question is whether he ordered his subordinates to finish them off or merely bore responsibility for their deaths because he was the official in charge."

Several Israeli newspapers reported Sunday that Foreign Minister Shamir, who was prime minister at the time and in that capacity directly responsible for the Shin Bet, both knew of the subsequent cover-up and participated in it.

One newspaper, the *Jerusalem Post*, quoted government sources as saying that Shamir "might have given the alleged order to kill the two terrorists by radio telephone while they were being interrogated."

The former senior military official interviewed Saturday by *The Times* said that "there is no question that Shamir knew of the cover-up. He authorized it."

The main question now, he added, "is what Peres knew" when he later assumed office.

The most serious allegations against Peres to date stem from reports that three senior Shin Bet officials approached him six months ago with their allegations against Shalom but that he took no action. The three officials, who were reported subsequently to have either been fired or pressured into resigning, then took their assertions to Zamir.

---